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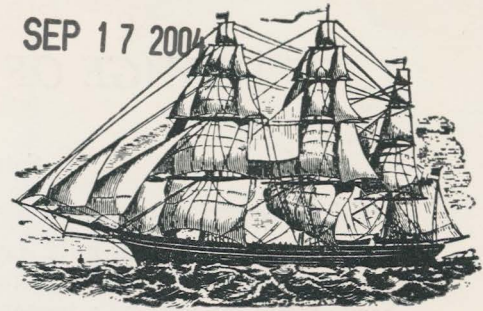
SEA LETTER

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President

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Director



J. Porter Shaw Library



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the Umpqua, Coos Bay, Noyo, the Coquille, Grays Harbor, The Columbia, etc. . . .

Remember, you are on a lee shore in command of a three-mast schooner that has been at sea for a couple of weeks. You have been unable to get a good sight for the last few days. You have no "power" except your sails. The coast is likely fogbound. There is a buoy—somewhere, and a lighthouse—somewhere. Your vessel, which was designed to carry cargo, is light and unwieldy because you have not much to bring from San Diego (West Coast schooners scorned ballast): maybe a piano and supplies for the mill town and logging camps—Flower-girl chewing tobacco, Russian salve, Snowflake lard, Kennedy's medical discovery, Hoarhounds for the children, Noyo axes, Blanket-lined canvas coats, etc.

So you stand off and on outside the bar waiting for propitious conditions to get in. What are these conditions?

The last reported soundings at low water on the bar were nine feet. You draw twelve, and every storm changes the location of the best channel and its depth. The most favorable situation is, of course, a fairly smooth sea, an on-shore breeze, the last of the flood tide which will help you in at high water, *and* being within a mile of the bar when these circumstances prevail. At best these conditions exist for a couple of hours a day—they also exist at night, but you don't have a searchlight. Still you might have a desperate fling at it.

Here are the last letters, written aboard ship, of a man who crossed the bar safely many times during his seafaring career, but who failed to cross it on his last voyage.

Robert Weinstein has obtained the permission of Captain Peterson's daughters, Mrs. Vera Paul and Mrs. Arthur (Olive) Peterson, to publish this letter, for which we extend many thanks to both of them.



The schooner C. T. Hill sails over the BANDON BAR

ON CROSSING THE BAR

TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN—To take a sizeable sailing vessel across a river bar on the Oregon Coast in the dead of winter (when the prevailing winds and storms always make for that dread of sailormen—a lee shore) is no mean feat. It takes expert seamanship, courage, and Luck. Yet around the turn of the century thousands of crossings were made each year—and many failed. Some vessels were wrecked and some turned back.

Today a few yachts and fishermen venture up and down this coast emboldened with powerful engines, radar and fathometers, and efficient aids to navigation. Breakwaters and dredging make "the bar" less dangerous but the open sea is still comfortable by com-

parison. But in 1908 your living was made by crossing the bar, taking on your cargo of lumber, and then getting out of the bar port and safely off shore.

Picture it! Hundreds of great wooden 2, 3, and 4 mast schooners (a few brigantines, barks, and ships also) sailing up and down this coast supplying the burgeoning cities of California with lumber to build and grow. No other means of supplying the demand existed. No railroads or highways for trucks had been built. The risks were great, but the rewards were high.

Now—about crossing the bar, those fearsome shoals that build up and choke the entrance to the rivers and lumber ports along the coast—Eureka,

LAST VOYAGE OF CAPT. OLIVER PETERSON, Schooner "Lucy"

Saturday, Dec. 14, 1907

My dear son and daughter:

We arrived off the bar in 12 days but have been unable to get in. It has been terribly stormy, one blow heavier than the last and a tremendous heavy sea and squalls. To day there is no wind, calm and the sea going down and the barometer going down. That means another southeaster. Oh, I am so tired of this sea life, surely this must be my last venture to sea. I Haven't the nerve that I had 20 or 25 years ago.

Sunday the 15th, was calm all last night, this is a lovely day and pretty smooth too, wind light from N.E. Can see the land and I am in hopes to get in tomorrow, weather permits.

Monday, Dec. 16th. Olive dear: We have been sailing round the bar all morning but no tug. It was half water 10 oclock so there will be no getting in today. The "Louise" is here too.

Wednesday, the 18th, Olive dear we have been sailing round the bar all fore noon but it's pretty rough. The tug didn't come and the "Louise" got in yesterday. We was too far off to get in with the tide, we are here now 8 days sailing round and comes pretty hard on me for this is the hardest part of the trip laying off and on round the bar.

Thursday, 19th. It's blowing a gale from south to S.W.

Friday, Strong south wind and rough bar, rainy.

Sunday, the 22d, Well dear, we are still sailing round trying to get in but have not as yet. The water is rough and we can't always find the place at high water. When it rains and blows we are glad to get out to sea, clear of land. This is the shortest day of the year and tomorrow winter begins, if it gets worse than it has been lately, while I have to stand it anyway as I am here and can't get away, have to make the trip. Doubt if we get in before Christmas. If not we will not have much of a Christmas dinner but I don't care for dinners if we could only get in.

December, 25th . . . I wish you a Merry Christmas. Yesterday we had dead calm and today it's blowing a gale from the south (hove to) 20 miles north of Umpqua, 28 days and 16 round the bar. Have just had dinner. Didn't have a very select dinner, in fact we haven't got much stores left. Eat the last potato for breakfast. Got plenty beans and flour but little beef but I don't care for dinners if we were only safe in port. I shall not be able to stand another winter.

Lovingly, from Papa

Thursday, 26th . . . Today is moderate, some westerly squalls and heavy swells. Got observation today. First time in week. 60 miles north of Umpqua.

Saturday, 28th . . . Well dears, the weather is moderate. Again once more we are abreast Umpqua but sea rough and the tide as ever late and early. I don't expect to get in before Monday or Tuesday even at favoret weather.

Tuesday, 31st . . . Last of the year we are still sailing and drifting around. The worst trip I can remember of. If it keeps moderate tonight we may get in tomorrow if the bar is smooth enough.

Thursday, Jan 2nd 1908. Well dear we are still asail on the ocean. I did expect to get in yesterday but it started to blow early in the morning and blew us out to sea as a New Years gift, and short of provisions.

Port Townsend, Jan. 10.1908 My dear daughter: We arrived here today as we could not get in to Umpqua. We had to get somewhere or starve. I am going to send for a new captain. I am not able to take her out and not if they would give her to me. I am going home as soon as the captain gets here. The mate may take her, will recommend him. This has been the worst trip I can remember. It Has completely worried me and I think the schooner will load here on the Sound.

Well dear, I will close with much love.

Lovingly, Oliver Peterson,
Papa.



*Captain Oliver Peterson
takes a sight from the
quarter deck of LUCY*



Crosses Last Bar

San Pedro, Jan 27.08 . . . Capt. Oliver Peterson, master of the schooner "Lucy," one of the oldest and most popular mariners sailing to this port, died in the Marine Hospital, San Francisco, Saturday night. His family, consisting of a wife, two sons and three daughters, reside on Eleventh St. in this city.

Capt. Peterson was the master of the "Lucy" for sixteen years, and sailed his vessel, lumber laden, from the Umpqua River to San Pedro, regularly. He left this port early in November, bound for Umpqua in ballast* and arrived off the bar at the mouth of the river in fifteen days. A heavy storm arose, and continued for several weeks, blowing his vessel hundreds of miles to sea, and after forty-nine days of battling with the storm provisions ran out, and he was obliged to make Port Townsend, several hundred miles north of his destination. The captain and crew were worn out and sick from exposure and work. Capt. Peterson left the vessel at Port Townsend and proceeded to San Francisco to consult his employers. He was nearly 70 years of age, and the exposure and hardships of his last voyage proved too severe a strain on his constitution.

The body will be brought to San Pedro for interment under the auspices of the Master Mariners Association, of which he was a prominent member.

*In ballast here means carrying no specific cargo.



Courtesy Morton-Waters Co.

Sometimes it was a breeze—The schooner SADIE sailed from San Pedro, crossed the Umpqua bar, took on her load of lumber, and returned to "Pedro" in less than 17 days. Another time she sailed from the Umpqua to San Pedro in 3 days 14 hours with 400,000 board feet of lumber. LUCY and SADIE were built by Bendixson in 1890 for the Gardiner Mill Co.

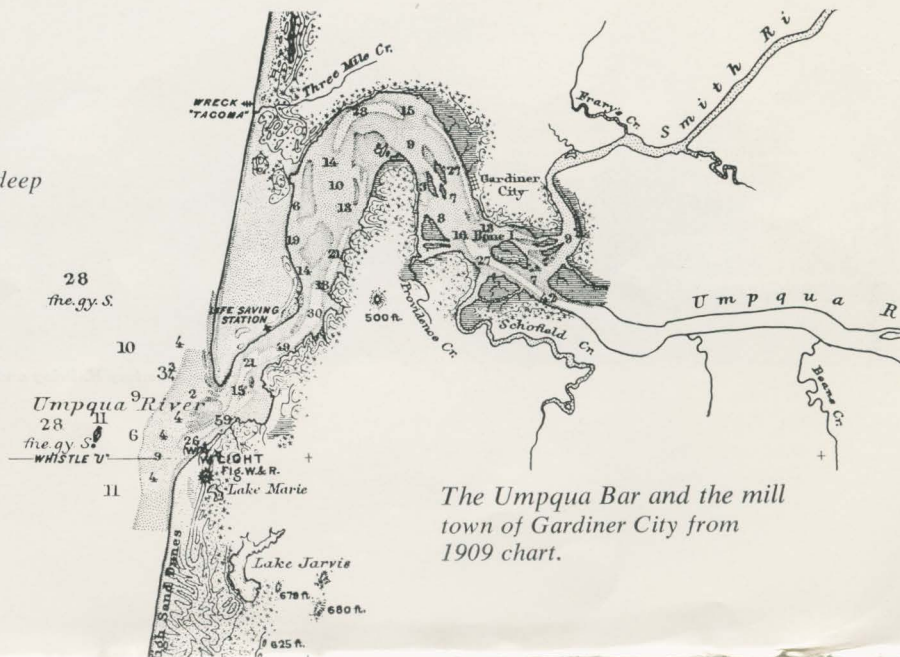
Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out of the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

—Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)



The Umpqua Bar and the mill town of Gardiner City from 1909 chart.

SAN FRANCISCO

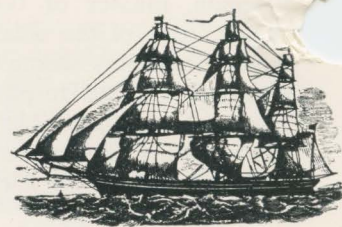
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SEA LETTER



BASIL KNAUTH, *Editor*

RETURN GUARANTEED



Courtesy H. Dring and SFMSHM.

Safely across the bar the schooner LC has filled her hold and is taking on a deck load preparatory to putting out to sea. The schooner VOLUNTEER and barkentine NORTH BEND await their turn at the Northwest Lumber Co. on the Hoquiam river, Washington.